

March 1, 2005: NORTON, LEAHY AND DISTRICT COURT JUDGES ASK CONGRESS TO NAME NEW ANNEX

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 1, 2005 NORTON, LEAHY AND DISTRICT COURT JUDGES ASK CONGRESS TO NAME NEW ANNEX FOR FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN CHIEF JUDGE HERE

Washington, DC—Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) and Senate Judiciary Committee Ranking Member Patrick Leahy (D-VT) today re-introduced a bill to name the annex of the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Building, which houses the U. S District Court and the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, for Senior Judge William B. Bryant, a former chief judge of the District Court, who twice broke the color bar, becoming the first African American federal chief judge here and the first black assistant U.S. Attorney. Judge Bryant, who is 93, is a longtime D.C. resident and graduate of the D.C. Public Schools whose distinguished legal career was established in segregated D.C. in the 1940s and 1950s before he was named a federal district court judge. Norton got the annex naming bill through her committee with passage by the House last year, but it was held in the Senate.

Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) objected to the naming because Bryant is a seated judge. To get the bill through the Senate, Norton has added a section declaring the effective date to be when the judge no longer holds this position. Norton said, "Because Judge Bryant richly and uniquely deserves this honor, I have added a section declaring the effective date to be when the judge no longer holds the position... We will celebrate this remarkable, historic judge and invite him to witness the honor when the bill passes."

Norton's bill follows a unanimous request to name the annex after him by Chief Judge Thomas Hogan of the U.S. District Court, and all of Judge Bryant's colleagues on the court, a recommendation of which he was not aware. She said, "This unusual request from all the judges of the court gives our bill great credibility. I am grateful to the judges of our U.S. District Court here for their thoughtful proposal that honors a Washingtonian of historic proportions. I very much appreciate the many efforts of Senator Patrick Leahy to get the bill through the Senate last year and for agreeing once again to be the lead sponsor of this bill. The residents of this city, the court that Judge Bryant has served so well, and the members of the bar here join me in our hope to get the bill passed this year."

Judge Bryant became Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court here in 1977 and went on senior status in 1982. He practiced law in segregated Washington when blacks were barred from membership in the D.C. Bar Association and even from using the bar library. Nevertheless, he became one of the city's best and most respected trial lawyers. Well known for his landmark cases, Bryant also taught at Howard University Law School where he graduated first in his class. "Judge Bryant's colleagues, who know his work and his temperament best, have found a particularly appropriate way for our city and our country to celebrate the life and accomplishments of a great judge," Norton said.

The full text of Norton's introductory statement follows.

This bill has an unusual origin. The Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, for himself and the members of the trial court, visited my office to request that the annex under construction for the E. Barrett Prettyman Federal Building be named for senior U.S. District Court Judge William B. Bryant. Judge Bryant was unaware of the desires and actions of his colleagues, who unanimously agreed to request that the annex be named for the judge. It is rare that Congress names a courthouse or an annex for a judge who has served in that court and even more rare for a judge who is still sitting. However, I am grateful that the House understood the unique importance of Judge Bryant and passed the bill last year. Unfortunately, the bill was stopped in committee in the Senate because of the reluctance to name a building for a seated judge. However, because Judge Bryant richly and uniquely deserves this honor, I have added a section declaring the effective date to be when the judge no longer holds the position. We must pursue this compromise to get the bill through the Senate. We will celebrate this remarkable, historic judge and invite him to witness the honor when the bill passes.

Judge Bryant's colleagues, who know his work and his temperament best, have found a particularly appropriate way for our city and our country to celebrate the life and accomplishments of a great judge. I know Judge Bryant personally, I know his reputation in this city, and in the law profession. I know that the request to name the annex for Judge Bryant reflects deep respect for his unusually distinguished life at the bar.

Judge Bryant began his career in private practice in the segregated Washington of the 1940s and 50s, when African American lawyers were barred from membership in the District of Columbia Bar Association and from using the bar law library. He established his legal reputation as a partner in the legendary African-American law firm of Houston, Bryant and Gardner and taught at Howard University Law School. His reputation as an extraordinary trial lawyer led to his

appointment as the first black assistant U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia. He rose to become the first African American to serve as Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court whose members now ask that the annex be named for Judge Bryant.

Particularly for his representation of criminal defendants, Judge Bryant was admired as one of the city's best and most respected lawyers. Among his many notable cases is the landmark *Mallory v. United States*, 354 U.S. 449 (1957), where the Supreme Court ruled that an arrested person must be promptly brought before a judicial officer.

Judge Bryant graduated from D.C. public schools, Howard University and Howard Law School, where he was first in his class. After graduation, Judge Bryant served as chief research assistant to Dr. Ralph Bunche when Bunche worked with Gunnar Myrdal, the famous Swedish economist, in his studies of American racial issues. Judge Bryant served in the U.S. Army during World War II and was honorably discharged as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1947.

Judge Bryant, who is 93, took senior status in 1982. He raised a family but, as Chief Judge Thomas Hogan wrote, "lost his beloved wife, Astaire and now lives alone—;with this court and the law as the center of his life."

This unusual request from all the judges of the court gives our bill great credibility. I am grateful to the judges of our U.S. District Court here for their thoughtful proposal that honors a Washingtonian of historic proportions. I very much appreciate the many efforts of Senator Patrick Leahy to get the bill through the Senate last year and for agreeing once again to be the lead sponsor of this bill. The residents of this city, the court that Judge Bryant has served so well, and the members of the bar here join me in our hope to get the bill passed this year.